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Pipeline decision a 'sell-out', skirts native peoples' advice

By Doug Smith
of The Manitoban
Canadian University Press

Six months ago most Canadians thought that there was a Mackenzie Valley pipeline in their future. Since then, Bob Blair has emerged as a modern-day David slaying the big bad multinationals of the Canadian Arctic Gas Pipeline consortium with his Alcan pipeline pebble.

Blair is being touted by Maclean's magazine and others as the Canadian who put together the ingenious alternative route that will allow Canada to enjoy the benefits of a northern pipeline without committing sundry atrocities to the environment and the native people of Canada.

The Trudeau government has reached a typically Liberal solution to the whole pipeline dilemma, because Blair allows them to have a Mackenzie Valley pipeline if necessary. But not necessarily down the Mackenzie Valley.

While all this is very pleasant to believe, and will undoubtedly do the Liberals no end of good in the next federal election, a close examination of the Lysyk and National Energy Board reports is, to put it mildly, somewhat disquieting.

Before one dips into either the NEB or Lysyk reports, it is wise to realize that they are results of a very hurried series of hearings. The NEB started hearings in April 1976 and continued them until May 1977. The board left itself one and a half months to prepare its final report, although there are reports that the board had drafted its recommendations before it finished its hearings.

Kenneth Lysyk, the dean of law at the University of British Columbia, was appointed to head a three-member commission into the social and economic effects of a pipeline in late April of this year. To make a similar investigation into the Mackenzie Valley pipeline, Thomas Berger was given three years, while Kysyk had three months.

In its report the NEB rejected the Canadian Arctic Gas proposal for a Mackenzie Valley pipeline as being environmentally unacceptable and gave conditional approval to the Foothills or Alcan proposal that will bring gas from Alaska down a pipeline that will be parallel to the Alaska Highway.

Despite this approval, the NEB did recognize that on balance, pipeline projects probably have a negative social "impact" and admitted that it "would do little to ameliorate the endemic social problems of the north."

The board had little choice but to dismiss the Mackenzie Valley proposals after the build-up of public opinion that had followed publication of the Berger report.

But because the Alcan route is a relatively recent proposal, and has not been considered as having much of a chance of approval, there has been little in the way of serious organization of opposition to the project and even less study into its environmental implications.

The other major objection to the Mackenzie Valley route was the



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Berger recommendation that no pipeline be built for 10 years to give time for a proper settling of native land claims.

It is argued by AICan that the land claims in the Yukon are much closer to being settled than the claims in the Northwest Territories and a pipeline would, in fact, bring about a resolution that is satisfactory to the Yukon Indians. The Alcan people also point to the fact that the Yukon has been already the site of southern settlement since the gold rush at the turn of the century. Of a population of 21,000, native people make up a third compared to the sizeable majority of native people in the Northwest Territories.

The Council of Yukon Indians in its brief to the Lysyk commission called for a pipeline moratorium of between seven to 10 years. The Lysyk report recommends a delay of only two years. CYI chairperson Daniel Johnson has said a delay of two years would pressure his organization into making hasty decisions.

Johnson said that the proposed \$200 million heritage fund will not pay for the suffering of the native people if pipeline construction goes ahead in two years. He has reiterated the point that the land claims of the native people in northern Canada are not about money but about control of the land and services.

It appears that there is likely to be as much opposition by native people to a Yukon pipeline as there would have been if it had gone down the Mackenzie Valley. The only difference is that the native opponents to the pipeline have not had the time to marshal their arguments or to gain much support in the south of Canada.

Pipeline proponents have long argued that a northern pipeline will be a godsend to Canada's faltering economy. The fact is that a pipeline is a capital intensive project and will do almost nothing to relieve the chronic unemployment in Canada. In fact, it could increase unemployment by draining money away from other forms of investment that

would provide more employment in southern Canada.

John Holliwel of the University of British Columbia has said that only under exceptional circumstances would a northern pipeline contribute to stable economic growth. A recent article in the *Financial Post* pointed out that the pipeline would bring benefits to certain industries such as the iron and steel, metal fabricating, concrete and air and water transport industries. The article said that these companies have been most enthusiastic about the pipeline and have probably blurred the difference between individual and national interest.

The Lysyk report recommended a two-year delay because it was felt a lengthier delay might kill the pipeline project. If the Americans could not get the gas through an overland pipeline, it was thought they would ship it by tanker. However, it is becoming apparent that the Americans might not need the gas as quickly as Canadians have been willing to give it to them.

The Working Group on Supply, Demand and Energy Policy Impacts on Alaska Gas, an American government task force, has issued a report indicating it would not be catastrophic if the U.S. were to leave much of its Alaska gas in Alaska for a few years.

The group calculates that if Carter's conservation program is adopted, natural gas shortages in the U.S. would disappear by the 1980s. The report also said that increased leasing of the coast of Mexico was likely to have the impact comparable to the delivery of Alaska gas and it would be at a lower price. In short, the pipeline could be delayed without seriously inconveniencing the Americans.

The saddest aspect of the government decision to okay a Yukon pipeline is that it ignores the major thrust of the Berger commission. Berger said that the government stood at the threshold as far as northern development was concerned. Southern Canadians could either continue to treat the north as a frontier to be brought to heel and exploited, or they could recognize and respect the north as the homeland of the native people of Canada.

It is sad to say that when faced with an opportunity for a bold departure from the past, the Trudeau government chose to stick with its tried and true policy of compromise and sell-out.

After years of studies and investigation, the government has settled on a route that is unstudied and unknown. For once the officials of the Canadian Wildlife Federation and the leaders of Arctic Gas can agree on something, and that is, as they say, that the decision to go with Alcan was almost certainly a political decision and has next to nothing to do with gas shortages or environmental impact of the economic needs of Canada.



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